

**Testimony in Support of
S.B. 929, An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to
Provide Free School Meals to All Students**

Lisa Hammersley, Executive Director
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Chairwomen Maher and Linehan, Ranking Members Seminara and Dauphinais, and distinguished members of the Children's Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of S.B. 929, An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students. I want to thank the Connecticut Foodshare, End Hunger Connecticut!, and the many organizations advocating for proper access to food and nutrition for Connecticut's students.

As the nationwide child nutrition waivers expire and state School Meal Assistance Revenue for Transition funds run out, we are concerned about the impact food insecurity will continue to have on students. While our neediest communities are supported by the national Community Eligibility Provision, many towns now struggle to identify and provide eligible students with breakfast and lunch. Identification can be difficult: families may feel a stigma when filling out the free or reduced-price lunch form, while other families may exceed the income eligibility requirement yet still be food insecure.

Hunger and food insecurity interferes with a student's ability to focus, concentrate, and learn. Whether it is starting their day with a nutritious breakfast, a healthy lunch with their peers, or simply getting more fuel with an afternoon snack before they embark on their homework, proper nutrition and access to food are critical components to student success. When students and families have consistent access to food and nutrition, students are more engaged in learning, absenteeism goes down, and physical and mental health increases.

We know students across the state are struggling. The data in Connecticut is consistent: one in five children is not confident about their next meal. This legislation transforms childhood experiences and allows for all students to have one less thing to worry about.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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